

Smith et al.

Best practices in creating value through social media

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Best practices in creating value with social media: insights from four Fortune 500 companies

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Abstract

The study of social media in the information system field has developed into a popular topic however the current research is largely fragmented. This multiple case study advances an a priori theory and model based on the four pillars of a new social media landscape framework, created by Aral, Dellarocas, and Godes (Aral et al. 2013), which are design and features, strategy and tactics, management and organization, and measurement and value. The a priori model is built from multiple disciplinary literature about online word-of-mouth (eWOM) which is at the core of creating value in social media. The investigation findings are of value to firms aiming to improve their social media strategy and implementation as well as how to use and strengthen their business model to support their social media efforts. Additionally, the theoretical model and findings can serve as a basis for further extension and refinement using findings from additional analyses.

Keywords

Online word-of-mouth (eWOM), social media, online review, reputation management, and best practices

Introduction

Most corporations are currently struggling with digital best practices where they report a lack of clear framework for top executives, knowledge, processes, plans, leadership, and resources to effectively use digital tools throughout the product life cycle (Divol et al. 2012; Davis et al. 2011). The capability to maximize organizational, product and service value through social media is especially relevant to future business success as leading companies demonstrate customer satisfaction superiority through omni-channel retailing where multi-channel retailing activities are made more seamless through social media (Rigby 2011).

From a theoretical standpoint, a need to bridge important gaps about core social media activities has been recognized by leading information systems researchers and ignited with a new social media framework designed to fill the gaps on what are current best practices in social media to create value and understand how social media is affecting business transformation (Aral et al. 2013). Further, "as more and more marketers incorporate social media as an integral part of the promotional mix, rigorous investigation of the determinants that impact consumers' engagement in eWOM via social networks is becoming critical" (Chu et al. 2011). With this paper, we aim to show how some of the most highly-rated companies employing social media strategy through multiple channels create value through building on this new framework.

To achieve this, the primary basis of this study was to confirm and build on successful factors from eWOM literature with related influences from consumer review design and management, social media, and reputation management literature. Through understanding these factors and processes, the study offers a perspective on universally acceptable practices which should help to optimize the information and goods or services provided to all stakeholders while reducing road blocks to value for companies and social media managers such as increasing liabilities challenging all companies involved in social media (Kane et al. 2009; Sussin 2012).

To do so, we first develop an a-priori model to guide a first round of interviews with senior executives responsible for social media and communication of four Fortune 500's companies. This study is unique in that it offers a perspective on how to address both the internal and external social media needs that most companies must consider to remain competitive in this dynamic global marketplace regardless of varying organizational structures, resource capabilities, and product types.

Background

Through social media, the meaning of eWOM has become significantly more than “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Current activity on Twitter, Facebook, and other online community platforms demonstrates that eWOM has progressed to include positive or negative statements from a full range of external stakeholders including competitors and activists or internal stakeholders like employees.

Social media tools represent a range of analytical tools used to collect online information from diverse online sources, distill insights using time-tested analytic methods, and create specialized reports contingent to company needs, functions, or business units (Harrysson et al. 2012). Social media interacts with a wide range of eWOM platforms that touch almost every industry, service or product type (i.e. TripAdvisor, Yelp, LinkedIn, EBay, Amazon, Facebook). Through this wide range of eWOM, the high availability of information on all products is increasingly blurring the differences between search and experience goods (Huang et al. 2009) which means that online reviews or eWOM information is important to all companies where it used to be more important mainly for search goods (Mudambi et al. 2010).

Research has long validated eWOM as an important means of building trust and differentiating an enterprise to positively influence product and service purchases (Dellarocas et al. 2007; Luo et al. 2013; Zhu et al. 2010). A primary goal of eWOM is to create or foster information sources that consumers can consult before purchase that they can trust and which provide accurate information on products and sellers (Mudambi et al. 2010; Pavlou et al. 2006) within all social media. These theoretical insights on eWOM further demonstrate how crucial understanding eWOM, maintaining positive eWOM, minimizing negative eWOM, and creating the best social media balance is to the success of an organization and their products or services. For the purposes of optimizing the content in this study, many important background citations were integrated later into the findings to show how to create value in social media and demonstrate the alignment of theory and practice.

The nature of this study is exploratory because leading researchers in the field have recognized that, “there is no consensus with respect to how responsibility for social media should be allocated within organizations, how social media activities should be funded and governed, what should be outsourced, and what broader changes with regard to an organization’s structures, processes, leadership, training, and culture are needed to harness the potential of this transformative force. There is no established path of activities that lead a company down the path of “social readiness,” and there are no widely accepted industry-specific best practices.” (Aral et al. 2013). So while we can see some factors that bring value to platforms, it is not clear how successful enterprises are creating this value with social media for users from start to finish.

To fill current gaps between social media and business transformation, Aral, Dellarocas, and Godes created a social media landscape framework with suggestions for research that guided our research design and analysis (Aral et al. 2013). Our exploratory research question was “How do companies use social media to create value?” Their social media framework posed questions to stimulate research on how companies are achieving social media success in the core areas of design and features, strategy and tactics, management and organization, and measurement and value (Aral et al. 2013). Their framework questions, definitions and attributes were revised to create a research design targeting the firms’ level viewpoint which will be explained in the methodology section and described in more detail throughout the findings section.

Methodology

Due to the lack of existing studies on how current organizations create value through social media, the investigation aimed to develop a model that demonstrates the success factors and current best practices of highly successful organizations that have created consistently positive results.

A Priori Model specification

The initial part of the research method was designated to identify useful theoretical constructs for an a-priori construction of a model theory. The base theory started from the social media framework. We provide a summary of social media framework activities at the firms' level below. The framework was broadened to include success factors and tangible or intangible value measures from theories that fit within the primary areas of the framework. With an understanding of current developments and capabilities, it became more evident how corporations were getting value from the whole system of social media and where they could integrate social media to optimize benefits. This system of theories was used to create the propositions in the a priori model with both the objectives that help shape the four areas of social media in successful corporations and the core resulting value of a successful system.

The a priori model, research questions, coding analysis, and findings were all structured to incorporate the social media landscape elements at the firms' level as presented by Aral, Dellarocas, and Godes (Aral et al. 2013). In addition, a business model framework (Osterwalder et al. 2010) showing which business resources and business model designs support the starting social media framework and how core elements of the business were intertwined in social media activities (see Table 1 below). By showing how social media is directly impacted by improving, and transforming business models, the study will aim to show why there are so many inherent differences among businesses which are not so different on a process and component level. The business model categories helped provide structure to the semi-structured interview scripts and give higher level categorization to intermediate variables. Through combining two different but related models, the findings are able to demonstrate causality between certain characteristics of these area activities or intermediate variables and their resulting value as detailed in the a priori model.

Core areas and description of firm level activities	Social media area attributes	Business Model Building Blocks	Building block categorization applicable to social media	Intermediate variables observed in theory and tool capability
Design and features: Describes how firms use specific social media features; and how organizations design, implement, standardize, and regulate these features to enable or constrain the use of technologies to achieve organizational and societal goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools and Services Features Platform presence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Customer Segments: 2. Value Propositions: 3. Channels 4. Customer Relationships 5. Revenue stream 6. Key resources 7. Key activities 8. Key partnerships 9. Cost structure 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Niche, mass, segmented, diversified, and multi-sided platforms or markets 2. New offers, performance, customization, design, brand/status, price, cost reduction, risk reduction, accessibility, convenience, usability 3. Right mix and life phases 4. Personal assistance, communities, co-creation 5. Advertising, usage fee, etc. 6. Physical, intellectual, human, and financial 7. Problem solving, production, platform, network. 8. Optimization, economy of scale, and reduction of risks, acquisition of particular resources or activities 9. Cost-driven, value-driven, fixed costs, variable costs, economies of scale, and economies of scope. 	Listening, acting, and engaging, collecting and aggregating data, internal or external knowledge exchange, creating or sharing unique or useful information, personalization, incentives, versatile or user-friendly web or application platforms, real-time and direct personal assistance, communities, problem-solving, engagement, individualized or segmented targeting according to platform functionality or audience, varying influencer leverage, targeted platforms and communities based on client or stakeholder needs, cross-functional support, third party services or key partnerships, expertise leverage, leadership support and participation, centralized information, planning and organization, dynamic and evolving strategy, projected capabilities, alternate revenue streams supporting social media, strong peer-based relationships, inter-functional structure, designated contact paths, guidelines, support for employees, and crisis management
Strategy and tactics: Describes how firms broadly use social media and create social media strategies that best meet their needs or achieve their individual or societal goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy creation Type of use 			
Management and organization: Describes how firms structure, manage, and allocate the processes, human resources, financial assets, and technology needed to develop, deploy, use, and interact with social media to meet their needs or achieve their goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology Processes Human resources Financial assets 			
Measurement and values: Describes how firms create, measure, allocate, or appropriate the value or welfare generated by the use of social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values Welfare 			

Table 1: Social media framework definitions and attributes

Since previous research on eWOM and social media strategy has been very focused on specific industries and product types, this study provides a more integrative theory for businesses to use and to achieve success in social media strategy. Both inductive and deductive process were followed due to the need to use existing theories in a new framework to build a resultant theory.

Multiple Case Study- Process and Analysis

Case study methodology, as directed by Yin, was chosen since it provides a distinct advantage when asking “how” research questions about a contemporary event of which the investigator has no control and of which is exploratory (Yin 2009). In addition, case study research is mentioned to be a highly respected research method specifically within the information systems field (Dube et al. 2003). The aim was to achieve replication through analytical generalization through a priori theory development and re-specification through case study findings since the samples would not have enough data points in common for statistical generalization.

The 32 organizations approached were chosen from multiple lists, which will remain anonymous, of leading Fortune 500 companies in social media. Selections were based on multiple additional levels of analysis (see Table 2 below) with the aim to approach companies actively engaged with customers, resolving issues, deriving ideas or improving process from eWOM, mitigating risks, ranked highly in customer service and social media metrics, and dealing with a high quantity of followers across multiple industries. Due to the limited candidate pool and number of participants that would commit, these four selected cases (see Table 3 below) could not be compromised as potential pilot cases.

Types of engagement	Consistently helpful or informational interactions and resolutions Online eWOM presence (paid, earned, or owned)
Volume of engagement	FB likes (>400,000) Multiple accounts and platform presences
Types of goods and services	Range of service and experience goods (optimal) Omnishopping channels Multinational corporations
Maturity and success	Recognition of social media success High American Customer Service Index (ACSI) score and comments (if applicable)
Level of quality or dedication	Article or corporate mention of using eWOM platforms for listening and meeting needs or improving products or services
Secondary data availability	Wide range of corporate information and news articles on social media strategy

Table 2: Multiple case study selection criteria for ideal cases

Company	Sector	Type of good	Interview participant	Case description	Case study consistencies
Dell	Computers, technology, support	Search and experience	Global director of social media	Multi-national presence with centralized social media planning and center of excellence, cross-functional collaboration, multiple social media recognitions, and over 8,000 social media trained and certified employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of engagement: helpful, listening, meeting needs, improving products or services, informational, resolution oriented on multiple platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) Social media presence: Mix of paid, earned, and owned Volume of engagement: Greater than 400,000 followers on largest platforms, multiple social media accounts on platforms, multiple platform presence Location: Based in the United States with international presence Multiple channel retailing: Online, brick and mortar, social media, mobile, call centers
JetBlue	Airline	Experience with search characteristics	Manager of corporate communications	Recognized for social media success with multi-national presence with centralized social media planning and cross-functional collaboration.	
Mayo Clinic	Healthcare and education	Experience, search, and credence	Global director of social media	Recognized for social media success with multi-national presence in all 50 states, over 150 countries, and numerous partnerships with a social media center of excellence.	
Anonymous	Hospitality	Experience with search characteristics	Global director of social media	Multi-national presence with centralized social media planning, cross-functional collaboration, and recognition of social media successes.	

Table 3: Selected cases for study

To improve accuracy, each participant was provided with a definition of best practices and asked to focus only on “the practices which had proven successful over time delivering quantifiable and highly positive results” (Thompson et al. 2010). Areas needing improvement were requested to ensure identification of current quantifiable limitations. The people chosen for participation were those directly responsible for planning, implementation, and integration of social media strategy in the company. Multiple sources of data (see Table 4 below) were collected to corroborate interview findings with additional evidence to ensure triangulation, reliability, credibility, and construct validity.

Research data by case	Purpose	Quantity or general details for all cases
Company interviews	Primary case evidence specifically coded to support theoretical propositions	1 Primary interview- (average 1-2 hour)
Recent press releases, interviews, or news articles	Additional perspectives or facts from other viewpoints to confirm and build on interview data and support case selection	2-5 minimum per case
Case studies from firms, related social media companies, or consulting groups	To confirm and build on interview data Supporting case selection	Average 1-3 case studies
Previous job listings or LinkedIn profile details	Interviewee profile or googled participant's job post advertisement to confirm and build on interview	All interviewees reviewed
Company social media governance information	To confirm and build on interview data Supporting case selection	Main website and website internal links LinkedIn/SlideShare presentations created and endorsed by participants
General community and platform governance and content	To confirm and build on interview data	Primary platforms – Facebook/Twitter Insights
Firm community and platform pages and content	To confirm and build on interview data Supporting case selection	Primary communities accessible from links on main company websites or Facebook platforms
ACSI Index Scores and Commentary	Supporting case selection	Reports (2012-2013)
Social tools mentioned in interviews or research	Reviewed tools and actions listed to comply with findings summaries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salesforce Radian6 • Salesforce BuddyMedia • Sprinklr • Appinions • SocialNet Advocacy • Facebook Insights • Google Analytics • Simplify360 • Crowdboost • Vocus • Varying social media tools based on hotel/brand needs

Table 4: Case selection and analysis evidence

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed, coded, and compared against all mentioned data including contrasting and similar extant literature to see where company practice conforms to current theory or refutes it. Every case was coded according to the three propositions (see Table 5 below) and broken down by activity creating value, value obtained, and current measurements.

Proposition 1	Companies use social media design and features, strategy and tactics, management and organization, and measurements to create or improve enterprise, brand, product, or service value
Proposition 2	Companies use social media design and features, strategy and tactics, management and organization, and measurements to improve customer relationships and the product life-cycle.
Proposition 3	Companies use social media design and features, strategy and tactics, management and organization, and measurements to strengthen enterprise, brand, service, and product health.

Table 5: Case study propositions

The investigator attempted to improve reliability by following an objective and systematic process including an eight step coding scheme (see Table 6 below) for creating, testing, and implementing a coding scheme to minimize rater bias (Bryman et al. 2007). A coding scheme for reference with all coding attributes and values in addition to definitions of the core areas was created and referenced to provide

accuracy during the process based on case study requirements (Bryman et al. 2007; Dube 2003). The analysis process was iterative and all evidence was presented as factually as possible through quotations and coded attributes or values to provide a clear chain of evidence.

1. Definition of recording units (for example, word, phrase, sentence, paragraph)
2. Definition of the coding categories
3. Testing of coding on a sample of text
4. Assessment of the accuracy and reliability of the sample coding
5. Revision of the coding rules
6. Return to Step 3 until sufficient reliability is achieved
7. Coding of all the text
8. Assessment of the achieved reliability or accuracy

Table 6: Coding scheme for case study analysis

Findings

In this section, the finalized, re-specified social media information system model will be presented which is visualized at the bottom of Figure 2. The overall research method is shown through the two figures. First, the business model framework was combined with social media framework (see Figure 1 below) to add depth in identifying how companies achieve their success. The development of the a-priori model was followed by re-specification through research and coding analysis conducted via a multi-case study based on three primary propositions shown as the resulting value.

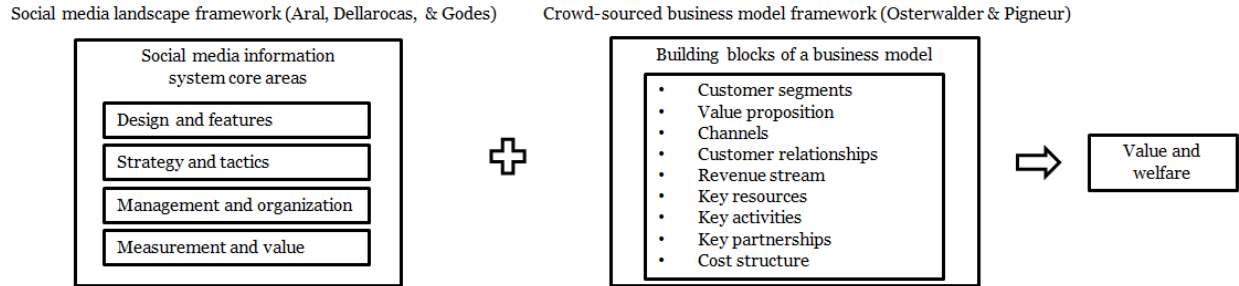


Figure 1: Social media information system success model base

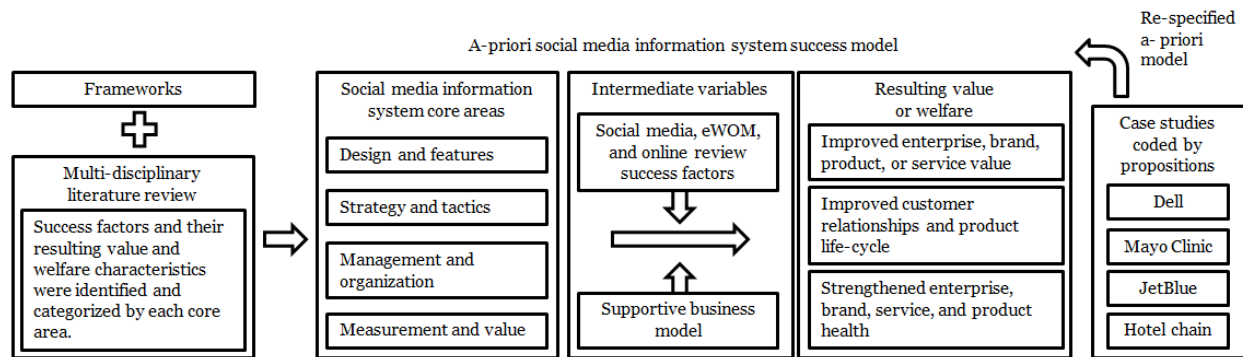


Figure 2: The re-specified a-priori social media information system success model

In the remainder of this section, an overview of the a-priori success model is provided. Following the overview, the findings from the re-specification process will be detailed according to the interviews and prior success factors theory constructs. To conclude, a reflection on the findings will be provided.

Overview of the a priori model

The nine building blocks and their sub-categories (see Table 7 below) of business models were used to generically show how businesses would build or improve the four core areas of the social media landscape. These categories allowed intermediate variables to be grouped easier, provided more leverage to demonstrate similarities across products as well as industries, and will show how social media is contributing to business transformation.

Building Blocks	Building block categorization applicable to social media
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Customer Segments: 2. Value Propositions: 3. Channels 4. Customer Relationships 5. Revenue stream 6. Key resources 7. Key activities 8. Key partnerships 9. Cost structure 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Niche, mass, segmented, diversified, and multi-sided platforms or markets 2. New offers, performance, customization, design, brand/status, price, cost reduction, risk reduction, accessibility, convenience, usability 3. Right mix and life phases 4. Personal assistance, communities, co-creation 5. Advertising, usage fee, etc. 6. Physical, intellectual, human, and financial 7. Problem solving, production, platform, network. 8. Optimization, economy of scale, and reduction of risks, acquisition of particular resources or activities 9. Cost-driven, value-driven, fixed costs, variable costs, economies of scale, and economies of scope. <p>(Adapted from Osterwalder and Pigneur)</p>

Table 7: Building block categorization adapted from (Osterwalder et al. 2010)

The a priori social media success model is different from the base models in multiple respects. Both base models are general frameworks which give rise to new theories. Combining the two models permits a more in depth look at how companies are effectively designing, developing, deploying, and using their social media information systems in order to generate business value and gain competitive advantage. The propositions highlighted as the resulting value were used to guide the research and analysis. Each one of the propositions discusses how elements of the social media practices, otherwise known as the four core areas, are creating value for the company as a whole. We can see that the social media practices, as structured in the framework, are the independent variables causing the output of the dependent variables which are the creation of value. It is important to point out that the observed intermediate variables are acknowledged to be an incomplete list. This is why we were investigating how companies achieved success and supplementing lists of intermediate variables with business model building blocks that provide more holistic terms for examples of knowledge exchange with co-creation or individualized marketing or profile design with niche customer segments. It was not the objective of this study to identify a core set of intermediate variables but rather to identify the core set of objectives and examples that have led to that success supported by some key theories. By understanding how the different intermediary variables are optimizing the process and the final value, companies can learn to create better, more consistent, and enhanced propositions for their customers and more definitive business models.

Re-specification

For each case study, a table was created summarizing the coded data which supported the propositions and led to the reaffirmation of this resulting theory in addition to providing insights on each of the building blocks of business models.

The following summaries on the four core areas highlight how their current practices, which support theories gained from the literature, create value leading to their noted success in social media. The detailed findings on the social media practices by core areas will be followed by further observations on how each of the generic building blocks cited in the “Business Model Generation” book (Osterwalder et al. 2010) receive new value through social media practices.

Design and Features:

Platforms and tools selections seem to be made where customer and business needs intersect. These firms have chosen some different tools customized to their budgets, team preferences, and industry. The general needs for optimizing eWOM in social and inter-organization operability all draw consensus on the features listed (see Table 8) which were provided in previous research without firm confirmation of utility (Stavrakantonakis et al. 2012). The range and design implemented by firms aims to provide ease of use for all internal and external stakeholders and clients.

Co-creation capability	Knowledge sharing
Platform enhancements	Risk management capabilities
Content analytics	Work flow management
Analysis tools	Multi-user capability
Social analytics	Influencer identification
Conversion Analytics	Attribute and holistic level features
Advertising Analytics	Easy navigation

Table 8: Important design functions and features based on theory and practice

Strategy and Tactics:

These firms aim to be helpful, meet customer needs, solve problems, add value, and build personal connections in all their activities whether it is with co-creation, knowledge exchange, personal assistance, or community activities. They consistently listen, act, and engage (Rishika 2012) in any owned and third party communities, blogs, social media platforms, and forums to improve trust (Nguyen et al. 2012), information quality (Mudambi et al. 2010), resolve issues, differentiate or obtain loyalty (Pavlou et al.

2006), helpfulness (Liu et al. 2011), and spot trends through the predictive nature of eWOM (Luo et al. 2013). Since there is a direct causal link between the social media participation of an individual and their purchasing behavior (Rishika 2012), these firms achieve their success by engaging them throughout customer life-cycle which includes during building awareness, product evaluation, purchase, confirmation of value delivery, and after sales phases (Mudambi et al. 2010). They learn from customer insights and aim to maintain an ecosystem of unbiased eWOM which permits them to achieve long-term customer retention and financial goals (Pan et al. 2011). Their methods are systematic to ensure consistent results but they always place the highest value on the customer's satisfaction.

Management and Organization:

Each of these companies demonstrate that some level of centralized planning and management is needed with structured processes, protocol training, and knowledge sharing to create a synthesis among cross-functional teams. Leadership championing and peer championing of the enterprise social media practices is essential. Supportive leadership and structure on a process level should be in place to guide employees to be able to see the greater impact of their actions on an individual and enterprise level. Employees should feel empowered to act, solve problems, and helpfully interact on a personal level with customers. The structure in place seems to be variable as long as the main objectives are being accomplished. Planning and directions should be based on current resources capabilities and grown dynamically as funding and more resources become available. Their successes demonstrate that it is crucial to leverage key partnerships and available expertise to add to planning, management, and knowledge sharing. The process of taking customer insights to create new value and make system improvements should be as consistent as possible. Projectized, incremental improvements to the system and technology seem to be the most popular and responsible way to ensure that funds and resources are effectively allocated.

Measurement and Value:

Their benchmarking is tied directly to involved or targeted functional areas, product or service attributes, brands, and the external environment. The more customizable, the more capability to see how information builds together and identify different trends for new strategic enterprise, brand, service, or product direction and value. Once an effective, fluid, and agile system is in place, the potential value is limitless.

These companies practices confirmed theoretical evidence that systems with these mentioned capabilities and attributes can create many improvements and value like brand building through groundswell (Li et al. 2011), price premiums, seller differentiation, or increased loyalty (Pavlou et al. 2006), customer satisfaction (Liu et al. 2011; Mudambi et al. 2010; Nguyen et al. 2012), and improved reputation (Pavlou et al. 2006). Customer insights gained through eWOM optimization (Mudambi et al. 2010), unbiased reviews (Pan et al. 2011), and increased participation from brand advocates add to content generation, strategic insights, and possibly cascades of positive opinion or circumvent negative cascades (Bikhchandani et al. 1998).

Often underscored as immeasurable, the continued consumer insights that are obtained through the optimization of eWOM features are a crucial success factor to businesses as demonstrated in example measurements from the case studies (see Table 9 below). These insights often lead to other intangible values which are not readily captured in quantitative measurements like process, policy, and capability improvements. These corporations aim to improve ways to measure the impact of these intangible values. However, they recognize the limitations of current measurements and find satisfaction in capturing partial aspects of these process improvements through the most current features and functionality previously listed.

Example values and measurements from case studies

- Daily, weekly, monthly benchmarking dashboards or reports on trend identification through sentiments, reach and size of impact, virality, tracked number of sales or click-throughs from widgets, links or tags to owned sites, campaign victories, improved premiums, and other data correlating to Net Promoter Score.
- Net Promoter Score comparable from social data
- Social media and media mentions from owned, earned, or shared platform activity
- Reduced call volume to customer support
- Intangible values: New offerings, improve product or service performance, improve life-cycle, create customized services and products, improve design, maintain and improve reputation, manage or improve price, reduce costs, reduce risks, and increase usability.

Table 9: Example values and measurements from case study

Each one of the cases clearly demonstrates how social media has become directly integrated with the business model and requires a well-planned business model to support it. As previously mentioned, the remainder of this section will be devoted to explaining how removing social media would be like removing the backbone of support to the rest of the working parts.

Customer segments:

Heightened functionality and increasingly versatile features in social media applications and platforms are providing organizations with a capability to provide highly personalized services that were unimaginable through traditional media. With the right knowledge and information tools, these firms create strategies and targeted offers to their desired customer segments relative to their interests and demographic attributes like age, gender, language, city, and country. Success with targeted engagement and increased social media participation is measurable through metrics like visit frequency, purchase frequency, or shopping basket content and has been proven to have a positive relationship to customer life value (Rishika et al. 2012).

Value propositions:

To add value or optimize enterprise, brand, product, and service offerings going forward, corporations will need to be socially ready within the defined scope of the value propositions. Social media is acting as a catalyst for new ideas and perspectives which permits more dynamic and evolving strategic direction and transitions through bottom-up networks, inter-connected functional units, and multi-organizational partnerships (Wilkinson et al. 2013). These brands recognize that the introduction of new ideas and thought processes aimed at meeting customer needs is essential to what makes their business operate. Among the plentiful added value opportunities that these social media practices demonstrate, their practices show that having a socially ready enterprise significantly heightens the capability to attain any potential value or act as the canary in the coal mine for potential problems on a global trending scale. Even though there is no one action plan, the same opportunities are present for all of these companies with the combination of these approaches guided by the measurements mentioned.

Channels:

Their teams combine efforts in owned, earned, and paid media to achieve their benchmarked objectives. A primary common aim is to improve owned social media to augment earned media and reduce paid efforts through content optimization leading to virality. These brands have become accustomed to the formulas to leverage helpful information, incentives, easy navigation to optimize search and sharing, problem resolution, and expertise for positive earned eWOM based on their benchmarking results. Their strategies clearly demonstrate that a multi-channel process aimed to optimize the product life-cycle through increasing awareness, aiding the evaluation process, enhancing purchase experiences, delivering value, and providing support.

Customer relationships:

Customer relationship development has been infinitely complicated by reduced face-to-face shopping experiences, third party review sites, increasing demands for transparency or honest practices, and the need to develop personalized relationships with customers. These companies find ways to steer to success with sincere and helpful personal assistance on social platforms that interest their customers. By building targeted and valuable communities, they offer opportunities to strengthen these ties through common interests recognized on user profiles, knowledge exchange through co-creation or reviews, and opportunities provided to connect with thought leaders and experts. If they cannot create a platform to meet the needs of their clients then they find their clients wherever they prefer to be. Finally, they offer clients the opportunities to share their opinions and stories through online review, posts, or crowdsourcing thus building buy-in. They recognize the importance of exchanging value and allowing a forum for expression whether it be positive, neutral, or negative.

Revenue streams:

Social media opportunities can offer companies a means to fund their social media practices or create new business. Expertise in the field has proven valuable to these businesses who have leveraged it to build

partnerships, transition their business model, or create welfare. Even without additional revenue streams, social media has proven to be sufficiently valuable on its own.

Key resources:

Full disclosure did not seem to be present due to the proprietary nature of their systems therefore it is hard to make generalizations. These companies had a mix of tools from outside vendors and some home-grown. They seem to overcome challenges and gain value with rapidly developing technology by using road maps, outside consultation, and industry awareness to give themselves a good starting advantage. Their systems are based on how to best utilize the internal expertise, knowledge, and present systems which are developed as financial resources are available often in a projectized manner.

Key activities:

There was an unrelenting dedication to problem-solving through social media based on the needs of their clients as well as other important stakeholders. They had clear procedures in place to help their teams make decisions with confidence. The opportunity cost for not having problem-solving as fundamental activity at the core of your business management is extremely high. In more and more competitive markets, these companies excel with human resources which are effectively trained to identify issues and improve customer satisfaction through social media to cement loyalty.

Key partnerships:

When monitoring the eWOM environment, the investigation found that social media provides an unlimited capacity to add transparency and new understanding to every relationship of your value chain, identify threats which could be detrimental, and provide clarity on how to build opportunities. From planning to future ventures, these companies demonstrate the importance of looking within and outside your network for insights, co-creation, new resource capabilities, and links to grow your offerings or value. If you don't have what you need to achieve your current goals, partnerships could provide that connection to obtain it. Social media is magnifying corporate capability to identify and benefit from these opportunities.

Cost structure:

While these firms have cost-driven requirements where they must remain within budgets and verify the value of social media, they are far more value driven with their high degree of personalized service (Osterwalder et al. 2010). They have a mix of fixed and variable costs. Currently, they justify social media investments which are not always tangible but are striving to lessen any gaps of understanding.

Implications

As brand management and CRM has evolved, enterprises have realized that continuously engaging with clients and monitoring their need to make changes in products or services is necessary for market awareness and overall success (Nguyen et al. 2012). In addition to the mounting threat of regulations or reputational penalties (Sussin 2012), it is essential for corporations to take risk management and due diligence measures to appropriately address negative eWOM effects which are still more powerful than positive eWOM effects (Park et al. 2009). Only through focusing on what is useful or beneficial to all stakeholders and demonstrating that comprehension through proactive actions can companies really stand out or maintain their success. The current marketplace has become a systematic environment which requires consistency and helpfulness to create trust, information to help evaluation, trust to spawn relationships, real-time listening to identify new insights, and prepared solution-oriented teams ensuring that objectives are met in a personalized manner. Firms are expected to demonstrate differentiation and offer value therefore it is time to re-align the business models to meet these objectives.

When companies want to break social media success down to a bottom-line, you can miss the fundamental simplicity to the value produced internally and externally. There is a more holistic and often altruistic approach that is behind these companies' efforts which drives this success through seeking to understand and meet the needs of their users. Value has become relative. Qualitative values have and should continue to gain traction and recognition to what they contribute to the whole. As some participating companies directly acknowledged, the biggest value to having a truly social enterprise is never having to reflect on the opportunity cost of not being prepared.

It is through these practices and objectives, highlighted in theory and practice, that corporations are able to achieve a high level of value. Without transparent, consistent, and honest practices to improve information quality, address issues, and monitor eWOM, there would be no consistent value creation from social media.

Conclusions

As observed by the leaders in the field, a link between social media and business transformation in particular still has many gaps (Aral et al. 2013). By demonstrating the processes it takes to achieve internal and external social media success, the research was able to show a multi-dimensional perspective of how companies are transforming to achieve this success in eWOM and social media. The research should demonstrate that companies must have a solid social media strategy to remain competitive in how they are actively monitoring and responding to the continuous engagement opportunities during the product life cycle as well as the increase of threats to brand and product reputation from negative eWOM. The identification of these essential guiding objectives in social media information systems should help to solidify the direction of social media practices in firms. Additionally, this research confirms that companies should have a social media strategy in line with their overall business strategy which is supported by efficient processes, systems, and resources.

The theoretical limitations present in the study include the limited sample size, participating industries, and information provided about proprietary technologies or processes which could have provided key insights which might re-shape the structure of the intermediary or dependent variables. The main methodological limitation present was the investigator's inexperience with case research which was overcome by the investigator providing diligent attention to structured design, documentation, and execution with the assistance of an advanced case study researcher to minimize the possibility of errors.

Despite these limitations, the study represents a first attempt to advance a theory of how successful firms are creating value through social media, and it may serve as a basis for future studies in which it can be extended and refined.

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